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Russian Reactions to the U-2 Incident

The official Soviet view about the U-2 incident has been given by Mr. Khrushchev, and we may expect him to reiterate this same view when he arrives in New York. However, my own observations lead me to believe that the "unofficial" view held by the ordinary Russian is rather different.

I have just returned from a short visit to the Soviet Union. Most unexpectedly, and contrary to all I was led to believe, I found a complete lack of excitement or even interest in the U-2 plane incident among the people with whom I talked. (This observation has been corroborated by others (Americans) who have recently been in Russia.)

One is baffled to explain this attitude in this sample of well-educated Soviet citizens after all the ballyhoo on the subject in the Soviet press (and perhaps even more so in the Western press). I asked one of my new acquaintances, an engineer, why he had traveled to Moscow to see the U-2 plane; he told me simply that he was just interested in seeing what a plane looked like that could fly so high.

Presumably, the Soviet government is not unaware of this lack of alarm among their educated citizens. One way to remedy the matter, apparently, consists in publication of a little propaganda book with the dramatic title "No Return for U-2."

On the cover the book promises to "tell the truth . . . ," and on the next page we read, "This book tears the veil from . . ." The book contains the major pronouncements by Khrushchev, as well as by Gromyko, on the subject of the U-2. Gromyko's press conference is a delightful performance. When asked if the Soviet Union does not maintain an agency for the collection of intelligence, he advises the correspondent from the Baltimore *Sun* who asked this question, that one should not judge the Soviet Union by American standards.

Then there are reprints of articles by Lippmann, Hanson Baldwin, Reston, and Alsop, all accompanied by appropriate commentaries. All of their critical statements concerning the U. S. handling of the affair are, of course, re-emphasized, but Alsop is dismissed as a "yapping dog" for his contention that the Soviet Union could not stop the U-2 overflights for four years.

But on this very subject the book is strangely uninformative, and leaves the Soviet citizen wondering. The *official* Soviet version is that on May 1 the order was given to shoot the plane down, and down it came. But it is nowhere explained why this order was not given earlier, *much earlier*. Taking the Soviet statement at face value, one is then tempted to ask the question: Why was the order only given on May 1? Was it because the Soviet Union wanted to blame the United States for the collapse of the Summit Meeting?

There are many pages in the book filled with "unsolicited" statements from Soviet citizens. I am sorry to say that none of my acquaintances from Leningrad were asked to give their views.

How can we account for this lack of alarm? Certainly Americans would be very disturbed if a Russian reconnaissance plane flew over Detroit. It occurred to me later that after three years of Sputniks, ordinary Soviet citizens, and even their scientists and technologists working in other fields, have not the faintest idea what the Soviet Sputnik rocket looks like, but they do know the characteristics of U. S. rockets by reading technical magazines.

They sense, quite clearly, the tremendous imbalance in the release of technological information in the two societies. Perhaps this is the reason why they appear to be not overly disturbed that the U. S. is gaining information about their military preparations.

But there is a much deeper point which has never been made to our Soviet friends; nor indeed has there been much discussion of it in the Western world: that a little espionage by the U. S. may be a very good thing for the Soviets. Basically, we are in a situation where the peace of the world is being kept by mutual deterrents with superweapons. But the Russians cannot be certain of deterring us unless they tell us just what they have to deter us with.

To be sure, Mr. Khrushchev does give us periodic reports about the power and accuracy of the Russian ICBM rockets. But with things being as they are, we are not very likely to believe everything the Soviets tell us. And it is quite important for the Soviets too, that we have some independent and reliable knowledge about the state of development of their superweapons. Only in this way can they feel sure that their military developments really function as a deterrent.

It is too much to hope that these facts will penetrate into Soviet thinking at a high level, since their obsession for secrecy is still dominant, but perhaps some day they will realize that the U-2 overflights, while valuable to the U. S. and perhaps leading to the Soviet this do not really threaten the peace. Eventually they may be open to logical persuasion that an "open sky" policy will discourage surprise attacks and keep the "cold war" cool.

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